Looking to the Future

Building on the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program's progress in 2010 and 2011, NOAA plans to take the following steps to advance deep-sea coral science and management in alignment with NOAA's 10-year Strategic Plan for Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems.

Advancing Deep-Sea Coral Science

The program is planning to begin three-year field studies in Alaska and the northeast, in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Meanwhile, the program will also complete the three-year field studies and data analysis on the west coast and in the southeast, and submit the results to the appropriate Regional Fishery Management Councils.

Parallel to the fieldwork studies, the program will continue to support smaller-scale, targeted analyses throughout the nation to bring forward deep-sea coral information that lies in archived images and fisheries data, monitor fishing activities in deep-sea coral areas, and develop predictive models of where deep-sea corals are likely to occur.

The program will integrate the new information into its national deep-sea coral geodatabase, and strengthen partnerships with other agencies and institutions to collect voluntarily contributed deep-sea coral records. The geodatabase will be peer-reviewed and made available to the public and the research community.

Advancing Deep-Sea Coral Management

Around the nation, the Regional Fishery Management Councils are increasingly interested in protecting deep-sea coral ecosystems. The South Atlantic, New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Pacific Fishery Management Councils in particular have advisory groups actively considering deep-sea coral science in the context of conserving habitats that are important to fisheries. Known deep-sea coral habitats that could benefit from enhanced protection in these and other regions are summarized in Figure 3.

As evidenced by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's positive recognition of the fieldwork results the program has provided to date, the program contributes information that is timely and useful to ocean resource managers for ecosystem-based management. Looking to the future, the program will continue to support all the Councils with the best available science to conserve essential and vulnerable habitats. It will also look to expand its role in assisting with other ocean management initiatives by delivering high-quality scientific information that will help protect, maintain, and restore the health and biological diversity of the oceans.